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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 003752

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GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/16/2015

TAGS: PREL KPAL EG IS ICRC MDA

SUBJECT: MDA: EGYPT AND ARAB LEAGUE LOOKING FOR "CONCILIATORY GESTURES" FROM ISRAEL

REF: A. STATE 89991 (NOTAL)

B. CAIRO 2515 (NOTAL)

C. CAIRO 2481

D. CAIRO 2058 (NOTAL)

E. CAIRO 1798 (NOTAL)

Classified by Charge Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) In the absence of the Foreign Minister, who has been in Brazil and is now in Libya, the Acting DCM delivered ref A demarche on May 16 to MFA Assistant Minister for Arab Affairs Hani Khallaf, stressing that senior U.S. officials may raise the Third Protocol/Magen David Adom (MDA) issue this week during the visit to Washington of Prime Minister Nazif. Khallaf said that Egypt was willing to be constructive but wanted evidence that Israel was prepared to make conciliatory gestures to improve the current atmosphere in the regional peace process. Khallaf further requested to know which Arab governments were ready to move forward on the conference issue, as he understood Egypt's position to be entirely in keeping with all other Arab and Muslim states. Responding to concerns that Egypt was leading efforts to block progress on the issue, Khallaf directed blame toward Turkey and other states for their hard-line positions on convening a diplomatic conference.

¶2. (C) Post has also engaged senior Arab League staff, who shared USG concerns directly with Secretary General Amre Moussa. The League position on the topic, as embodied in a March 2001 Council of Ministers Resolution rejecting Israeli inclusion in the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, remains fixed, and it would take considerable effort by the League and members to amend the League's position ahead of its next Council meeting in September. League Spokesman Zaki shared with us that Moussa was not opposed to resolution of the issue but believed it encumbent upon Israel to create a "conducive atmosphere" through conciliatory gestures to the Palestinians and the Arabs on the peace process. Post understands Swiss envoy Didier Pfirter will return to Cairo in late May for meetings with senior Egyptian officials, including the Foreign Minister. Likewise, the Charge intends to raise our concerns with the Egyptian Foreign Minister as soon as he returns to Egypt and we can arrange an appointment. End summary.

Egyptians Insist "Time Not Right"

¶3. (C) With the Charge awaiting a meeting with Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit upon the latter's return from Libya, and with MFA Assistant Minister for Multilateral Affairs Fathalla on extended travel in New York for the NPT Revcon, the Acting DCM delivered ref A demarche to MFA Assistant Minister for Arab Affairs Hani Khalaf on May 16. The Acting DCM described our interest in resolving the Third Protocol/MDA issue and requested Egypt's assistance within the Organization of Islamic Conferences (OIC), in Geneva, and with the Arab League. We advised Khallaf that Washington had taken onboard Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit's comment to the Charge during their March 30 meeting (ref B) that Egypt would "try to be helpful" on this topic. The Acting DCM called for the GOE to support the convening of a diplomatic conference later this year aimed at bringing the Magen David Adom (MDA) into the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.

¶4. (C) Khallaf, who mentioned that earlier in his career he was responsible for multilateral humanitarian issues, said that Egypt had for some time been interested in resolving the Third Protocol/MDA issue but was now particulary concerned with the question of timing being discussed by the Swiss and the USG. The international situation with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said, was currently not conducive to changing what he described as unanimous Arab and Muslim opposition to MDA membership. Listing general Arab concerns over Israeli policies toward the Palestinians, Khalaf questioned assertions that other Arab states were willing to move forward on the Swiss and U.S. proposals. Asking for specific names, Khalaf said that Egypt believed

that opposition among Arab states to the Swiss efforts was unanimous. Egypt did not specifically oppose eventual resolution of the issue, but did share the general Arab position that the timing was not right. Second, Khalaf questioned what "positive steps" had been taken by Israel to signal that the atmosphere for resolving this issue was right. Evidence that other Arab states were more forward-leaning on the subject, he continued, would help to change Egypt's current stance. In light of the lack of progress on consideration by the Swiss of holding a separate conference dealing with Israeli behavior vis-a-vis the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Arab position will likely remain consistent, he argued. Still, other countries within the OIC such as Turkey have been more hard-line on the MDA issue, Khalaf stated, sourcing MFA reports from his diplomat son based in Geneva. The most effective information that the U.S. could provide, he concluded, was evidence that the Israelis were taking steps to resolve outstanding issues related to the peace process.

Swiss Envoy Expects to Return to Cairo in May

15. (C) Speaking to Swiss Embassy officer Peter Nelson May 12, poloff learned that the Swiss envoy handling the MDA issue, Didier Pfirter, is expected in Cairo for his second official visit toward the "end of May" for consultations with the GOE. (Note: Assistant Minister Khalaf confirmed to the Acting DCM during their meeting that Pfirter would be in Egypt possibly May 27 or 28. End note.) The Swiss envoy hopes to meet with Egyptian Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit, who was out of town during Pfirter's last Cairo visit. Nelson welcomed poloff's readout on recent talks in Washington between Pfirter and Department officials, as well as readouts of post's ongoing dialogue with GOE and Arab League contacts on this topic. While tracking the issue closely, Nelson admitted that Pfirter was controlling exclusively the MDA portfolio for his government, and that the Swiss Embassy was not engaged with GOE or Arab League officials on the topic.

Arab League Resolution Defines Opposition to MDA Membership

16. (C) Poloff met Arab League Deputy Secretary General for Palestinian Affairs Said Kamal May 10, and again on May 11 in the company of League official Soheil Bseiso, to explore League thinking on the MDA/Third Protocol issue. Kamal, generally reasonable and cooperative toward the U.S., was categoric in his rejection of Arab League flexibility on the subject, arguing that the Israeli side "deserved no concessions" while it pursued expansion of West Bank settlements, construction of its security wall, and targeted violence toward the Palestinians. Bseiso, like Kamal a Palestinian, had attended Pfirter's April meeting with Amre Moussa and described the latter's position as adhering to League policy. Generally inflexible and doctrinaire on the issue, Bseiso sought to link resolution of the MDA issue to Swiss efforts to address discussions on the 4th Geneva Convention. Bseiso asserted that Moussa was bound by a resolution adopted by the Arab League Council of (foreign) Ministers in March, 2001, and that he was merely implementing Arab League policy. Bseiso shared a copy of that resolution and asserted that only a new resolution could amend the League's position.

17. (C) In a separate meeting May 15 with League Spokesman Hossam Zaki, poloff raised USG concerns over reports that Secretary General Amre Moussa was spearheading opposition to

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the Swiss effort to convene a diplomatic conference to address the Third Protocol/MDA issue. Stressing that the Swiss intended to move forward with the diplomatic conference, and that Moussa himself was being increasingly identified as an impediment, poloff stressed that the issue was important to the USG and an issue we were committed to resolving. Zaki responded defensively, arguing that the League was only reflecting member views, but committed to sharing our concerns with Moussa. The same afternoon, Zaki called poloff back twice after discussing with Moussa to say that the Secretary General believed the issue should and will be resolved. Moussa felt that the Arabs would respond in kind to "positive gestures" from Israel, that is, if Israel created a "conducive atmosphere" of respect and cooperation on the peace process, Zaki relayed. Such respect and cooperation are so far absent from the Israeli side, he asserted.

18. (C) During a May 16 meeting with Arab League Secretariat Chief of Staff Hesham Youssef on other topics, Youssef raised the Third Protocol issue with poloff, noting that the USG position on the subject had been conveyed to his office by Said Kamal. Youssef largely repeated what other senior League officials had said, requesting the USG to show as much

interest in the issue of the Fourth Geneva Convention as it was showing in the MDA issue. To poloff's assertion that regional Red Crescent Societies had indicated willingness to be constructive on this issue, Youssef asserted that the Federation of Red Crescent Societies sent the Arab League a letter "very recently" in which it argued that the time was not right to address MDA membership in the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement.

Suggestions on Next Steps With GOE and Arab League

19. (C) We recommend that the Department consider approaching Egyptian Assistant Minister Fathallah in New York to press our concerns and relay USG positions, as he is responsible for the multilateral portfolio within the MFA. Secondly, for the Charge's next meeting with the Foreign Minister, post would welcome cleared talking points that address GOE concerns expressed above and specific steps we recommend the GOE take. Lastly, we will seek a readout from the Swiss Embassy of the expected Pfirter visit to Cairo later this month.

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GRAY